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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 001177

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/14/2018

TAGS: MARR MASS MCAP PREL RP

SUBJECT: PACOM COMMANDER AND AMBASSADOR CALL ON NEW ARMED
FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF

REF: MANILA 1144

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Meeting with new Chief of the Philippine Armed Forces Alexander Yano on May 14, the Ambassador emphasized that Philippine counterterrorism successes had won attention from senior U.S. policymakers, and that the USG stood ready to continue with assistance. Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) Admiral Timothy Keating discussed his May 12 trip to Burma and upcoming high-level military meetings between U.S. and Philippine officials, congratulating Yano on the victories he had achieved against terrorists and insurgents throughout his career. Yano thanked the Ambassador and Admiral Keating for their support and said he looked forward to broadening the range of U.S. training and assistance activities for the Philippine military. We have an excellent relationship with Yano, whom we know well from his previous role as Army Chief. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) PACOM Commander Admiral Keating and the Ambassador, along with Embassy officers, called on newly designated Chief of the Philippine Armed Forces Alexander Yano on May 14. Admiral Keating provided a readout of his May 12 stop in Burma with USAID Administrator Henrietta Fore to deliver the first load of U.S. relief supplies in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis. Admiral Keating said U.S. forces in the region stood ready to ramp up assistance immediately and that we hoped the Burmese would accept more U.S. aid. General Yano lamented that the Philippine government had a medical team ready to deploy to Burma, but they had been unable to obtain visas from the junta. He said that now was the time for the Burmese government to consider human suffering first and put aside political differences.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador and Admiral Keating congratulated Yano on the successes he had won against terrorists and insurgents in his previous position as Philippine Army Chief. The Ambassador remarked that these successes had garnered positive attention from senior U.S. policymakers, with Keating emphasizing that he was confident that the U.S.-Philippine partnership would continue to strengthen across the range of bilateral and multilateral issues that we work on together. Admiral Keating said he thought the upcoming Shangri-La Dialogues in Singapore at the end of May and the PACOM-hosted Mutual Defense Board/Strategic Engagement Board and Chiefs of Defense Conference proposed for August would provide excellent opportunities for General Yano to engage with high-level U.S. officials, including Secretary Gates, on military-military issues.

¶4. (C) Clearly pleased with their visit, Yano thanked the

Ambassador and Admiral Keating for being the first foreign dignitaries to call on him in his new position and for the strong support the Philippine Armed Forces had received in building their institutional capabilities and in the fight against terrorists, particularly in his native province in Mindanao. Yano reflected on his cooperation with U.S. forces in the successful hunt for Abu Sayyaf Group leader Khadaffy Janjalani, which culminated in Janjalani's death at the hands of Philippine forces in January 2007. He noted that since that time he had seen the close relationship between U.S. and Philippine forces grow even stronger. Keating agreed and said that he hoped to see continued U.S. training of Philippine forces at a mutually agreeable pace. Citing the mutual benefits both sides reap from such training, Keating said, "We want our young soldiers to experience Philippine culture and the many wonderful facilities and ranges you have here." Yano concurred, adding that Philippine officers and enlisted soldiers alike greatly benefited from the alliance.

¶5. (C) Hinting at his future plans for the Armed Forces, Yano said that he planned to continue pressing the fight against communist and Muslim terrorists, but would also broaden the Philippine military's focus on humanitarian activities, an initiative started under his predecessor, General Hermogenes Esperon. Winning the war against poverty through infrastructure and economic development, Yano said, is going to be key to eliminating insurgencies. At the same time, Yano said, the military must prepare to cede power to law enforcement as security is established in conflict zones.

Yano told the Ambassador and Keating that he was at the Philippine Military Academy with Philippine National Police

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Director General Avelino Razon and that he looked forward to working closely with the police to align training so that it provides the greatest benefit to the Philippine people in the form of security and stability.

¶6. COMMENT: General Yano and Admiral Keating met previously during a reception aboard the USS PELELIU, while the ship was visiting the Philippines in July 2007. The two already enjoy a warm relationship as evidenced by Yano's fond memory of the reception and their conversation. Yano is well known to the Ambassador and the Embassy, and the mission has enjoyed an excellent working relationship with him throughout his career. He is expected to make his mark quickly on the Armed Forces, although it appears he is still working out staffing issues as only his J2, J3, and deputy J5 were present at the meeting. While soft-spoken, Yano is firmly in command, as evidenced by his quick action on May 14 when he publicly dispelled rumors and press reports that the AFP would offer bounties to soldiers to help defeat the New People's Army. In a nationally-televised interview, Yano said he expects soldiers to perform their duties professionally, without expectation of reward, a strong message to troops and the media alike. In his position as Chief of the Armed Forces, Yano will be the subject of intense scrutiny from all sectors, and he is already showing his ability to handle pressure with a calm and reassuring demeanor. END COMMENT.

¶7. (SBU) Admiral Keating did not have a chance to clear this cable before departing Manila.

BIOGRAPHIC NOTES ON GENERAL YANO

¶8. (C) Lieutenant General Alexander Yano was installed as the 38th Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces on May 12, 2008, after 10 months as Commander of the Philippine Army. Yano is considered one of the most capable and experienced officers in combating terrorism in the Philippines. As Chief of Staff, Yano has vowed publicly to intensify the fight against the Abu Sayyaf Group and the New People's Army. Yano is the first Mindanao-born military officer to assume the top position in the military. Yano is seen as loyal to President Arroyo and

a strong advocate against military adventurism, as evidenced in his speech at the change of command ceremony (reftel). He has undergone training for various military career fields to include Special Forces Operations and Intelligence. Yano, who graduated from the U.S. Infantry Officer Advanced Course in 1986, engages easily with U.S. civilian and military officials and interacts well with PACOM. We judge he will be open to strengthening Strategic Engagement Board activities.

¶9. (C) General Yano spent the early years of his career in combat assignments in Central and Northern Luzon and the provinces of Samar during the height of the communist rebellion in the 1970s and 1980s. Since 1992, his assignments have focused heavily on the Mindanao region. He was the commander in charge during a November 2001 hostage crisis in Zamboanga, Mindanao. Yano's professional handling of the situation, in which over 300 fully armed fighters from the Moro National Liberation Front had taken more than 100 hostages in a city building, led to the release of the hostages. Later he was appointed as Chairperson of the Government Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front based on his past successes and understanding of the intricacies of the Mindanao conflict.

¶10. (C) PERSONAL DATA: Alexander Yano was born in Sindangan, Zamboanga del Norte, on June 13, 1953. He is the eldest of five children, and his parents were public school teachers. His brother Cesar is a colonel in the Philippine Army. Yano is married to Estela Aragon Yano, a retired military nurse, and has a son, Ervin Andrew. Yano initially studied engineering in Cebu before entering the Philippine Military Academy (PMA). He is an accomplished athlete, and while at the Philippine Military Academy, set records in the high jump and the 400-meter hurdles, and was a boxing and karate champion. One of his first acts as Chief of Staff was to issue a call to all personnel of the Armed Forces to uphold the highest standards of personal discipline and physical conditioning, a testament to his ascetic nature.

Education:

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- Cebu Institute of Technology - Civil Engineering
- Philippine Military Academy - Class of 1976
- U.S. Army Infantry Officers Advanced Course in 1986

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